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TAGS: ICTY PREL PROG PHUM SR

SUBJECT: ICTY ACTION PLAN UPDATE #4; AUGUST 25, 2006

REF: BELGRADE 1325 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Michael C. Polt, reasons 1.4 (b,c,d)

This cable describes GoS ICTY Action Plan Implementation as of August 25, 2006.

SUMMARY

¶1. (c) This week saw the most action to date on the media campaign portion of the Action Plan. Kotunica made a public statement about Serbia's resolve to hand over Mladic to The Hague - if he is found on the territory of Serbia. While the PM's statements were welcome, we have continued to push him to be more explicit on arrest and to sustain his personal engagement in a stepped up campaign (septel). Operationally, the GoS is expressing confidence that they may see some results in the near future on fugitive indictees - though not on Mladic. End summary.

ACTIONS

¶2. (s) Co-Action Plan coordinator Rasim Ljajic told embiffs during their weekly Action Plan implementation briefing that the GoS is working on three tracks now) Hadzic, Tolimir, and Mladic. Regarding Hadzic, he said the GoS is going after his financiers in Novi Sad, leaning particularly hard on one individual to force him to talk or go bankrupt. (NFI).

¶3. (s) Regarding Tolimir, he said they were seeing additional progress over what was reported last week. He said BIA chief Rade Bulatovic told him something could happen very soon. He noted Tolimir's wife had been extremely well briefed on communications procedures, keeping very tight rein on her cellphone and landline conversations, making only one small mistake in the past two years (NFI).

¶4. (s) Regarding Mladic, he said they had recently expanded surveillance measures against people known or suspected of being in Mladic's new support network (ref)) to include some number of active military officers. All the subjects under surveillance are in Belgrade. He said he thought arresting the previous supporters had been a mistake, as it drove the network underground and forced Mladic to use new faces.

MEDIA PLAN

¶15. (c) Ljajic was intensely interested in the Embassy's reaction to the Kostunica statement. Emboffs told him that this was a generally positive step, but not entirely sufficient. He asked what the international community still needed to hear. Emboffs responded that, while unable to speak for all interested parties, at least three main changes to Kostunica's approach would be helpful: first, he should eliminate the qualifiers, stopping at the need to apprehend Mladic and not adding the shopworn "if found on the territory of Serbia". Second, Kostunica should explicitly say Mladic will be arrested - saying Serbia is committed to "hand him over" to The Hague (local media translated it as "extradite") does not signal to Serbia's people or its law enforcement and intelligence communities that the government will and should arrest him. Finally, the PM and other government spokespeople should stop drawing parallels between Mladic and Dudakovic. The Action Plan is about Hague indictees, especially Mladic, and that) and that alone) needs to be the focus of the statements. Emboffs also reiterated that the PM's message would only register through repetition) we needed to see a concerted, week-in week-out campaign, not just a one-off. Ljajic seemed to take the points seriously. (Note Ambassador raised the issue directly with PM Kostunica in a 8/29 meeting) see septel. End Note)

OTHER ISSUES

¶16. (s/nf) Ljajic said he talked to del Ponte by video link on August 23, and she told him (in strictest confidence, so please protect) she would not give a report to the EU in September. She told him she could not give a positive report now due to lack of progress to date, but thought giving a negative report would be counter-productive - i.e., would "de-motivate" the operational people who, she said (according to Ljajic), seemed to be making more serious efforts. She told Ljajic she would not issue a positive report until Mladic was located (NOTE: not captured), and preferred to stay quiet until that time to allow Bulatovic and other operational professionals to do their jobs. Ljajic said they discussed Dinkic's dilemma, about claiming he would quit the government - thereby forcing new elections - if talks didn't restart by October 1. Ljajic surmised that, if there was some substantial movement (emboffs inferred that to mean apprehension of Tolimir or Hadzic) in the meantime, that might give Dinkic enough political cover to stay his decision temporarily.

COMMENT

¶17. (c) The statements we saw on the 25th were the most direct so far, and were delivered live by Kostunica himself - not through a government spokesperson. We believe this to be a necessary, but not sufficient, element to a successful media campaign - a campaign that should ideally include the Serbian equivalent of an Oval Office address from Kostunica to the Serbian people. As for Dinkic, he and other G-17 Plus senior officials continue to be adamant that they will withdraw support from the government if SAA talks do not resume by October 1. Since the EU sounds increasingly intransigent on the matter, and with del Ponte seemingly unprepared to issue a report absent solid information on Mladic, Dinkic may soon find his hand forced.

MOORE